

that a number of Members on this side indicate they would object to extending the vote past 12:45. Everyone should understand that. The managers of the bill—and I have spoken to our manager, Senator BAUCUS—understand that. If anyone tries to extend the time past 12:15, there will be an objection. We will vote at 12:15.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BENNETT). Is there any objection to reserving of the minority's time? Hearing none, the time is reserved.

The Senator from Wyoming.

WELFARE REFORM

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about the issue before the Senate. The previous comments this morning sounded like a political rally. We ought to talk about the issues before the Senate instead of spending all our time criticizing the President.

We have before the Senate welfare reform, to extend what we have done in the past. Welfare reform has been a remarkable success story for millions of people. Welfare reform is working because former recipients are working. Families once dependent on welfare checks are now looking forward to the independence of a paycheck. That, of course, has been the purpose of the program. Through the years it has been very successful.

This bill deals with the effort to provide meaningful work and more opportunity for welfare recipients to move off welfare, to promote healthy families, to provide opportunity for health and marriage programs, to give States the flexibility to continue to work on the programs they have had.

We are very pleased this is now before the Senate. As a Finance Committee member who has worked on this for a very long time, it is something that we need to pass and make available to people in this country.

The legislation before the Senate, H.R. 4, the Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone Act, makes the necessary changes in existing law to make it even more of a success. America began a war on poverty more than three decades ago. However, the good intentions of that policy produced conflicting results. Seniors were lifted out of poverty, poor families received basic health care, and disadvantaged children were given a head start in life.

Many Americans were injured by that helping hand. The welfare system actually became an enemy of individual efforts and responsibility. As dependence passed from one generation to the next, the vicious welfare cycle began for some families.

Between 1965 and 1995, Federal and State welfare spending increased from \$40 billion to more than \$350 billion per year. However, all this money produced virtually no progress in reducing child poverty.

In August 1996, Congress passed a progressive welfare reform law that

transferred welfare benefits into temporary help, not into a permanent way of life. The new system honors work by requiring all able-bodied recipients to work or go back to school to further their education.

The goal of the 1996 welfare reform law was to give participants a strong, time-limited support system as they developed long-life skills that encourage independence.

That is the purpose of this entire program. It has been successful. It provides childcare funding to help families meet the work requirements while limiting the benefits to 5 years. States must promote self-sufficiency. They are given the flexibility to reach that goal.

The following results of the 1996 landmark welfare reform bill speak for themselves. From August 1996 to June 2003, the number of families on welfare fell from 4.4 million to 2 million, a 54-percent decline. In the same time period, the number of individuals fell from 12.2 million to less than 5 million, a decline of 60 percent. From 1996 to 2002, child poverty went from 20.5 percent to 16.7 percent. This represents a reduction of over 2.3 million poor children.

Child poverty rates among African Americans and Hispanics were at or near record low levels. The percentage of never married working mothers increased from 49.3 in 1996 to 65 percent in 2002. Childcare funding has continued at record levels. Let me say that again: Childcare funding has continued at record levels. We are going to be faced with a resolution shortly to increase that. The fact is, we have had ample dollars in the past. We have fewer people now and all different kinds of programs going into that. I hope we do not add \$6 billion to the cost of the program.

State and Federal funding for childcare from the childcare development block grant, TANF, and social services block grant increased from \$3.2 billion in 1996 to \$11.8 billion in 2003. In 2003, an estimated 2.5 million children will receive subsidized childcare from these funding sources. From 1996 to 2003, child support collections increased from \$12 billion to \$21 billion. This demonstrates a pattern of success, moving people in the direction this was designed to move them.

Wyoming, my home State, has had particularly good luck. In the wake of these changes, welfare reform has been phenomenal. In fact, the number of individuals receiving assistance has dropped approximately 90 percent since 1994. This was accomplished with total weekly hour requirements of work of 40 hours, which is above and beyond the current law. That is what is in the reauthorization bill before the Senate.

Last year, Wyoming received a \$19.9 million bonus for reducing the out-of-wedlock birth rate.

Wyoming also has over \$30 million in reserve funds they are able to use when this bill is passed. This increased flexi-

bility will not only help my State keep folks off the welfare rolls, but provide assistance to childcare and other expenses while continuing on their path of self-sufficiency.

I am very proud of my State's success. Our experience proves welfare reform is a strong and comprehensive policy to uplift and empower people to be able to earn for themselves. I am encouraged by the initial results of welfare reform, but there is still a lot of work to do.

I support the chairman's bill because it does the following: It increases work hours to 34. This is better to prepare recipients for full-time employment. I would like to see that number of work hours be increased to 40. Wyoming has made that work well.

This creates a partial credit system for States doing everything they can to make this even better. We have increased childcare spending by \$1 billion over 5 years. It allows the States to use Federal money no longer used on cash assistance. Increased flexibility allows for more activities.

I hope we move this out of committee. We have been deferring it by extending the old bill. We need to put the new bill into place. We need to stop the uncertainty for the States as to what we are doing.

I thank Chairman GRASSLEY for his leadership. I hope we can move this week to conference and keep our commitments to equip TANF recipients with the skills they need to take care of themselves and their families.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. ENSIGN. Mr. President, I will talk a little about jobs this morning.

How much time remains on the Republican side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority has 21 minutes 40 seconds.

Mr. ENSIGN. Mr. President, is there a unanimous consent on how the time is divided on our side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is not.

Mr. ENSIGN. I ask unanimous consent I have 10 minutes of the remaining 21 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, might I ask for 10 minutes after the Senator completes his remarks?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Does the Senator propound a unanimous consent?

Mr. BOND. I propound a unanimous consent request I be recognized for 10 minutes following Senator ENSIGN.

Mr. BAUCUS. Reserving the right to object, might I ask the Chair when we are scheduled to go back on the bill?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority has 21 minutes remaining, and the minority has reserved 1 minute 10 seconds. When that time has expired, we will return to the bill.